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# Eulogy for the Divine Ms. G



by C.Flisi

Dogs howl at times of great emotion.  
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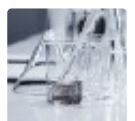
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emotional songs in Italy is sung by Andrea Bocelli. In Italian that song is called “*Con te partirò.*” The English translation is “Time to say goodbye.”

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And finally it came time for me to say goodbye to Giada, aka “the divine Ms. G.” She came to us as a little more than a pup from a rescue group in a nearby town almost 17 years ago. She had been plucked from Naples, in southern Italy, where she had been marked as fodder for a pit bull ring. You know, where they take indefensible street dogs and use them to train pit bulls to attack and kill in the ring. Rescue groups down there try to scoop them up and send them north before the worst happens.

Ms. G was about the size of a beagle, but more slender and graceful, with the coloring and general conformation of a miniature pinscher. Her fur was glossy and black, with a few beige markings on her muzzle and legs. She wasn’t pure because she was oversized for a min-pin and one of her ears

flopped over a little at the end. I didn't mind that flapping ear. It made her more expressive when she turned to look at us with that little flop waving in the wind.

When we first met at the rescue center, my husband and I were struck by her perky attitude and independence. She wasn't afraid to come up and greet us, sizing us up, and then she scampered off with her canine companions. She saw no need to whine or plead. She had a great sense of self, an integrity that we admired. My husband liked her conformation: a Doberman in miniature, he said. Once we had seen her, we didn't consider any other dogs.

She was at least 15 months old when we brought her home on August 17, 2005. Since she had been a street dog, there was no way of knowing her exact age. The vet figured she was more than a year based on her teeth but he admitted that he could've been off by six or nine months. That would have made her 18 at the time when we had

to say goodbye.

G was perfect — even or especially in her imperfections — from the beginning. No problems for the technical stuff: she was pretty much housebroken when she arrived. She was chill when left alone in the apartment. She enjoyed meeting other people, other dogs on our long morning walks. She wasn't thrilled about thunder, rain, or fireworks, but accepted them as part of life. She LOVED to eat, and would eat anything — everything in her bowl for starters, everything she found under the dining room table, everything my husband slipped her at table when he thought I wasn't looking, everything hidden in the grass when she thought I wasn't looking.

She was the champion lizard hunter of our town. Her personal best was eight lizards in 15 minutes. No other dog in the neighborhood came close. She didn't want to EAT them; the game was in outsmarting and catching them.

Then she lost interest and spit them out.

She was equally adept at catching mice, proof positive that an old dog CAN learn new tricks. When she was 14, we spent a few weeks in Slovenia, where there was a field pock-marked with mouse holes near our hotel. G knew the mouse smell from previous encounters, but she had never been close to mouse holes before. She quickly learned what was needed: focus, agility, determination, and lots and lots of patience. She bagged eight mice during our stay.

To call her a diva would be to do her a disservice. She was direct and unpretentious, but wily and coquettish when it served her purposes. Many of the male dogs in our town were crazy about her, testament to her winning ways since testosterone-infused males don't usually care about spayed females. And she played them along. Her first boyfriend was a French bulldog about her age and size. Seeing

them play was like watching a porn film, all flashing pink private parts, panting and thrusting on his part, teasing and wiggling on hers.

Another was a gigantic Leonberger, who towered over her. Their play consisted of her hiding beneath his huge grey body while he tried to “find” her without stumbling on his own legs and crushing her. They both found this great fun.

Another of her favored boyfriends was a large brownish crossbreed, part Lab, part furry indefinite. He was old when they first met, and not inclined to sentimental attachments, but she found something about him irresistible, and actively pursued him to the point where he would stop his human if he smelled Giada while they were walking in town, and would not budge until my gal caught up.

All three of these boyfriends died before her.

But none of them was as important to her as her friendship with Domina, a female boxer-mix she encountered about two years after she had come to live with us. Domina was Giada's age, twice her size, and unspayed. Females like this don't always get along, but these two hit it off like gangbusters. On her daily walks, Giada would sniff the ground thoughtfully, searching for Domina's smell. If she found it, THAT was the route we had to take.

Their bond was so strong that I was moved to write about it in *Crystal and Jade*, when Giada in effect saved her friend's life. The book was illustrated by a local artist, whose part-husky female was Giada's second-best friend. (And Giada was her *first* best friend, as the husky didn't get along well with other dogs). Book promotions included local public appearances, readings, newspaper articles, and Internet publicity, and Giada handled all of these with aplomb.

They were not her first experience with

social media. She had been interviewed by local and international television several times, including an appearance on SKY TV during the Democratic primaries of 2008. She was asked whether her human was voting for Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama, and her reply, filtered through me, was, “Well, I am black and I am female, so take your pick.”

Because she was sociable, she took naturally to social media. She also took well to travel, after an uncertain start. The first time she was in a car for more than an hour, she threw up. Well, THAT was not going to work well with our travel-minded lifestyle. Gradually we got her used to moving around by car, first by not feeding her before a trip, then by stopping every hour during a trip, until finally she was an automotive veteran. Her longest voyage was a full-three day marathon from southern Spain to northern Italy, done in a tiny space eked out of a packed vehicle, and shared with another dog to boot. She handled it



perfectly, with no complaints . . . and she set a sterling example for her nervous young canine travel companion.

She immediately loved riding on the train. Sometimes she would drag me to the nearby train station and tug me down the stairs to the platform area, then look at me expectantly. “Well, aren’t you going to buy tickets so we can ride to Milan?” I tried to accommodate her whenever I could, so she went to press conferences, art galleries, sightseeing tours, movies, even museums, whenever the organizers agreed to turn a blind eye to her presence.

Her many travels led her to a part-time career as a journalist. She wrote about her travels for an Italian magazine called *Animal Glamour*. I translated her words from *chienne* to English, and the magazine editor translated them from English to Italian. So she was published in two languages and her stories appeared on multiple websites.

She acquired a passport early on, and logged nine countries during her lifetime: Italy, France, Monaco, Spain, Gibraltar, Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland, and the United States. She stayed in B & Bs and five-star hotels and relished all of them, provided they had big beds she could curl up on, and comfy blankets she could burrow under. She ate at cafes, trattorie, and some toney restaurants. For all of these, I always asked the management ahead of time if well-mannered small dogs were allowed.

Once I had to meet a client at a two-star resto for a long meeting and was loathe to leave Ms. G at home alone. The management gave grudging assent to my bringing her, “provided your dog doesn’t create problems.” I arrived early, settled Giada under the table with some grissini, and greeted the client when he arrived. We had our meeting, did our business, shook hands, and got up to leave. At that point Ms. G emerged from under the table and my luncheon guest was

dumbfounded; he hadn't the remotest idea that a dog had been lying inches from his shoes. (Thank goodness Giada never developed a taste for shoe leather).

Her appetite was such that I first realized something was wrong when she began to get fussy about her food. She never snubbed the premium kibble I had been offering her for 14 years, and then, all of a sudden, she did. The vets never did figure out what was wrong with her. Her stomach was swollen and she couldn't keep down what little she ate. The diagnosis was an inflamed stomach lining, surely, and cancer, maybe. Rounds of pain-killer and antibiotics later, and the inflammation subsided. The appetite returned, and she was back to her feisty playful self, walking five kilometers a day, greeting her friends, canine and human, for another 18 months.

Then in September 2019, a sudden transformation. She had what the vets

call a seizure — running madly in circles, foaming at the mouth, eyes distended, utter panic. After which she refused to walk, snubbed her food, lacked the energy to move from her sleeping pad or lift her head. After a week of IVs twice a day at the vets with no improvement, I made the appointment with the Grim Reaper. The morning of what was to have been her last day, she changed her mind, got up by herself, ate a little food, kept it down, astounded the vets. I canceled her date with the Reaper and reveled in her remission.

<https://tenderly.medium.com/dead-dog-barking-65f5dbb58219?sk=3c0042a942986df4bad1745a99319d1f>

But there was no escaping the condition called “ageing.” Her sight and hearing began to fade, and so did her mental capacities. Arthritis curtailed her physical activity. She couldn’t jump on the bed anymore. Then she couldn’t jump on the sofa.

Then she couldn't reach her favorite low-slung armchair.

When we decided to move from Italy to the US, I wondered about the cruelty of subjecting her to the trauma of a transatlantic flight. Many healthy dogs don't survive such a trip, and, in her fragile condition, perhaps it made more sense to end her life in Italy. But the Divine Ms. G was a fighter, as she had proven in recent years, so I wanted *her* to make the choice.

<https://medium.com/illumination/a-moving-experience-live-dog-amid-dead-insects-bd2167d363cd?sk=ed9bb10c5a388c70cd0712a3e93c63e9>

She made it! She survived that long and harrowing flight, and the six-hour car ride that followed. She learned the layout of her new home, much smaller and simpler than her Italian abode, and she adapted to new food, new snacks, a new doggy park, new canine neighbors, and wonderful new green

trails to explore. She had functioning A/C last summer and functioning heating this past winter, neither of which had been a given in Italy.

She had many new and wonderful experiences. What she didn't have was time. Her cognitive decline became more obvious, her blindness and deadness idem. I had to carry her up and down the steps to our apartment, and to the doggy park. Still, as long as she was eating and moving around the park with enthusiasm, all was good.

Then she began stumbling in the park. Her legs would give out while she was eating. She would lie on her sleeping pad most of the day, sometimes inspecting the squirrels outside the window. (I have no idea if she actually *saw* them, but their movement may have stimulated something in her brain).

She lost interest in one of her snackies. Then another. She snubbed one dogfood after another. Then peanut

butter. Then the Ben & Jerry's gelato she had adored; it had served as camouflage for the opioid she was now taking three times a day. She was restless at night, so I would take her outside at 3 or 4 am. Sometimes she would relieve herself, sometimes not, since by now she had little control of her bodily functions.

Appetite and activity — the two bellwethers. It was time. Because regular vets don't make house calls and I wanted Giada to be in familiar surroundings in her final moments, I made an appointment with one of the doggy death doctors operating in our area.

On the chosen morning, Giada didn't want to eat for the third day in a row. She had two accidents in the house, but when I carried her to the doggy park, she trotted around *con brio*, engaged in the spectacle of birds and squirrels surrounding us. Life! Except for her wobbling, unsteady gait and grey muzzle, she could have been a

dog half her age. She pulled on her leash with focused determination as we walked back to our building. But she still didn't want to eat anything, not bacon bits roasted chicken breast or sliced ham. She snubbed every proffered snack.

The vet arrived precisely on time and was patient as we described to him how absolutely wonderful our Giada was. Then I carried her to her sleeping pad and sat beside her as he administered the first shot, a sedative to put her to sleep. She didn't wince. Ten minutes later he applied a tourniquet, wrapped her rear in a diaper in case of accidents, and administered the phenobarbital that stopped her heart.

The literal translation of "*Con te partirò*" is "I will leave with you." That is an accurate description of my life with the Divine Ms. G. A part of me, a HUGE part of me, leaves with her. Friendship, loyalty, love, *la vita stessa*. You can't say goodbye to yourself but a



piece of your heart dies when her heart stops. And then you howl at the moon.

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